

# TRAVELOG

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- ★ Audie Murphy collection grows at American Cotton Museum
- ★ Museum of Automobile History owner sells some prized classics, to focus on San Marcos venture
- ★ Tourism organizations selected for free, prime exhibit space at travel information centers



Celebrations at Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historic Site commemorate the 176th anniversary of the signing of the Texas Declaration of Independence at the "Birthplace of the Republic of Texas."

## CELEBRATING 176

**H**ISTORICAL re-enactors portraying Texas heroes Col. William B. Travis, Gen. Sam Houston and Davy Crockett will help lend an authentic air to the free Texas Independence Day celebration March 3-4 at Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historic Site.

This year's two-day festival commemorates the 176th anniversary of the signing of the Texas Declaration of Independence on March 2, 1836, by 59 men who gathered on the banks of the Brazos River for the Independence Convention.

Visitors, who can mingle with members of the Texas army and other re-enactors in period clothing, will be transported back to a time when Texas was a sovereign nation. That experience also includes watching the craftsmanship of Texas artisans, hearing music and stories about the republic's past, and witnessing arms and artillery firing demonstrations.

Activities include photos with the Texan heroes, a performance by the Aggie Wranglers country-western dance group, Tanner Family Minstrel Show, a blackpowder rifle salute and a Texas-sized birthday cake.

A highlight of the event is a roll call of the direct descendants of the signers of the document that declared Texas' freedom from Mexican rule.

The commemoration is set for 10 a.m.-5 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday at the "Birthplace of the Republic of Texas," between Navasota and Brenham off State Highway 105 and F.M. 1155.

Along with the special celebrations, visitors can enjoy Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historic Site's three year-round attractions—Independence Hall, the Star of the Republic Museum and the Barrington Living History Farm.

For directions or more information, call (936) 878-2214 or visit [www.birthplaceoftexas.com](http://www.birthplaceoftexas.com).

## TRAVEL NEWS

**M**ANY OF the places that tell the real stories of early Texas are being restored and rehabilitated through the Texas Historical Commission's Historic Sites Program, and little by little, these historic sites are re-opening to visitors.

After being closed for more than a year, San Antonio's newly restored Casa Navarro State Historic Site is the latest to reopen, an event that was marked with a celebration of Texas hero and leader José Antonio Navarro's birthday Feb. 25.

The historic property was the 1850s adobe and limestone homestead, store and office of Navarro, who signed Texas' Declaration of Independence.

The project included repairs to plastered walls and wood, as well as interior and exterior painting and whitewashing throughout. New exterior steps and a ramp were added to the Mercantile Building.

The first floor of Casa Navarro will serve as the visitor center, with a welcoming video, museum book store and gift shop. The front gate, walkways and courtyards in the site were rebuilt to meet accessibility needs.

New educational exhibits were created to compliment the renovated structure. Those exhibits—hands-on and interactive installations—highlight Navarro's role in Texas history, the architectural materials of the site, and the history of daily life in the old neighborhood of "Laredito" where Navarro lived.

A highlight of the project will be the installation of a newly designed, hand-glazed tile mural by renowned San Antonio artist Jesse Trevino.

Brazoria's Levi Jordan Plantation State Historic Site and Bonham's Sam Rayburn House Museum State Historic Site also are scheduled to reopen this month—March 3 and 17, respectively. El Paso's 1875 Magoffin Home State Historic Site will open May 12 after a \$1 million-plus renovation project that includes a new roof, woodwork and adobe repairs, and restoration of period paint colors and finishes.

The Starr Family Home in Marshall reopened Nov. 30 after major restorations, including carpentry repairs, exterior painting true to the home's original 1871 colors, rebuilt windows, and new interior paint colors and restored furnishings that enhance the step-back-in-time experience for visitors.

Paris' Sam Bell Maxey House, which underwent extensive repairs and a complete repainting, reopened in January.

For more information, visit [www.thc.state.tx.us/hsites/hsdefault.shtml](http://www.thc.state.tx.us/hsites/hsdefault.shtml).

**A**MARILLO has big plans in the works as they are counting on a \$113 million downtown development strategy to be a game changer that opens up many more opportunities to draw in big business.



COURTESY OF THE AMARILLO CONVENTION AND VISITORS COUNCIL

A master plan to develop Amarillo's downtown district by 2014 includes a ball park, parking facilities and a full-service hotel.

Sugar Land developer Wallace Bajjali will take lead on the public-private initiative that will establish a \$69.3 million convention-center hotel, a \$30.3 million minor league ball park and a \$13.4 million parking garage downtown. Additionally, to maximize foot traffic and the area's success, a new civic plaza will incorporate the Amarillo Civic Center, the Globe News Center for the Performing Arts and Amarillo City Hall.

It is expected that these collective projects, to be complete in 2014, will

draw enough people to downtown that a snowball effect of growth will follow with housing, retail and restaurant development.

"It's long overdue," says Eric Miller, director of communications and digital assets at the Amarillo Convention and Visitor Council. "It will give us so many opportunities to compete for convention business and will make downtown a more viable community."

Miller also is excited about the stadium. "We have a long history with minor-league baseball going

back to the '30s, and attendance has never been our problem," Miller says.

A website—[www.newamarillo.com](http://www.newamarillo.com)—has been launched to showcase the plan and to maintain updates on its progress.

Officials project a \$98 million economic impact from the hotel during the next decade and \$89 million from the stadium in the next three decades.

The project will be financed with private and public money, including revenues from ticket surcharges, but would not require a property-tax increase. Wallace Bajjali expects to contribute \$9.6 million to the project.

The city would own the hotel but lease it long-term to a private company to operate—possibly a Wyndham franchise.

About \$42.5 million in city-issued revenue bonds will fund part of the construction of the stadium and parking garage. The city would own both structures and lease the stadium to Southern Independent Baseball. Money from citywide hotel occupancy taxes and 10-percent events ticket surcharges will help cover those revenue bonds.

**T**HE AUDIE Murphy/American Cotton Museum in Greenville recently acquired a collection of more than 60 Audie Murphy-related items, making it the largest repository of such artifacts. Renovated exhibits featuring the additions will be unveiled at Audie Murphy Days, April 20-21.

The items had been on display at the Audie L. Murphy Memorial Veterans Hospital in San Antonio. The Murphy family decided on the move after the hospital no longer had room to display the items.

Murphy, born in Hunt County, was the most decorated soldier of World War II. He later became an actor and songwriter.

This collection includes his uniform, several of his movie scripts, the auto-lite sign he used to practice target shooting when he was young, and four of his guns, including the German Mauser he picked up during WWII.

The museum will process the artifacts and begin incorporating them into existing exhibits, many of which are being revamped.

For more information, call (903) 450-4502 or visit [www.cottonmuseum.com](http://www.cottonmuseum.com).

**D**ICK BURDICK, who opened Rosanky's Central Texas Museum of Automotive History in 1981, will auction off many of his classic vehicles and is closing the location to focus his attention on his newest museum, Dick's Classic Garage, which he opened in San Marcos in 2009.

The March 3 auction, at the Rosanky museum, includes President Lyndon B. Johnson's convertible 1964 Lincoln Continental (proceeds will benefit the Lyndon B. Johnson Foundation) and about 90 other vehicles, including a 1903 Stanley Steamer Runabout, Johnny Cash's 1970 Silver Shadow Rolls Royce, Cornelius Vanderbilt's Silver Ghost Town Car and Countess Porceri's 1933 Duesenberg Model J Sports Sedan. Auction items will be sold by digital slide.

Auctioneer Daniel Kruse told the *Austin American-Statesman*, "The museum in Rosanky has been a very rich and proud part of Dick's history, but he's going to fulfill his dream at the new museum in San Marcos, which is really just 30 minutes down the road. He wants to leave a legacy, something that's going to last long after he's gone. Consolidating his cars and selling his interests in Rosanky will provide a fund to run the new museum long after Dick's gone."

For more information, visit [www.kruseclassics.com](http://www.kruseclassics.com).

TTIA'S NEW BRAND IDENTITY

**A**FTER A YEAR-LONG rebranding initiative to better communicate the value and importance of the travel industry in Texas, the Texas Travel Industry Association has unveiled its new brand identity, proclaiming *Life's Better in a State of Travel*.

TTIA's new brand identity and the accompanying website redesign was presented to attendees of the 22nd Annual Texas Tourism Unity Dinner on Feb. 21 in Austin.

TTIA President and CEO David Teel says the new brand identity better expresses the correlation between tourism and the dollars it brings to the state, noting that tourism is the state's third largest industry. When people travel Texas, life is better, he explains.

According to the Office of the Governor, Economic Development and Tourism, travelers spent \$57.5 billion in Texas in 2010. That travel spending directly supported 529,400 jobs with earnings of \$16.5 billion.

This branding falls in with the organization's mission to "unify and develop industry leadership that will support and influence the growth of Texas travel and tourism."

For more information, visit [www.ttia.org](http://www.ttia.org).



COURTESY TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT



A hiker meanders through Spanish moss at Government Canyon State Natural Area in Bexar County.

**I**N AN ATTEMPT to increase opportunities to enjoy the outdoors, **Texas Parks and Wildlife Department** has opted to open **Government Canyon State Natural Area** in west Bexar County during select holidays throughout the year, including Christmas Day.

Government Canyon typically has been open only four days a week, closing Tuesday through Thursday so staff can continue implementing a comprehensive natural resources plan.

During 2012, Government Canyon will remain open mid-week to accommodate holiday day use, starting with Spring Break, March 13–15. It also will be opened for Emancipation Day (June 19), Independence Day (July 3–5), Thanksgiving (Nov. 20–22) and Christmas (Dec. 25–27) holidays.

“Despite recent statewide budget cutbacks that impacted our agency and resulted in losing employees, Government Canyon management saw an opportunity to increase access to the state natural area without diminishing the ability to effectively steward resources, provide customer service and ensure safety on busy weekends,” says Government Canyon Superintendent Chris Holm. “By choosing weeks during the year when we knew that a large number of people would be off from work or school, we felt we could offer a greater opportunity for Texans to

visit, without jeopardizing our mission as a state natural area.”

Since opening in October 2005, Government Canyon State Natural Area has been closed mid-week for staff to conduct prescribed burns, enhance woodland and cave habitat for seven indigenous federally endangered species, and to develop and maintain hiking and biking trails.

A long-awaited plan, which has been delayed because of staffing shortages and tight budgets, is to open the first campground.

Although no formal campground opening date has been set, Holm says that soon, nature enthusiasts, scouting groups and families will have the opportunity to enjoy an evening stargazing, learning about nature during evening ranger programs and telling stories around a campfire.

For more information, visit [www.tpwd.state.tx.us/spdest/findadest/parks/government\\_canyon](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/spdest/findadest/parks/government_canyon).

#### INDUSTRY INSIDERS

**B**Y APPOINTMENT of the **Galveston Wharves Board of Trustees**, **Capt. Michael J. Mierzwa** stepped into his new position as **port director**, effective Feb. 15.

“The port is fortunate to have someone with Mike’s expertise take the helm,” says Board Chairman

Roland Bassett. “He has demonstrated excellent leadership skills and proven himself well-qualified in managing port operations.”

Before the appointment, Mierzwa was the Port of Galveston’s deputy port director. He also served as manager of the Texas Cruise Ship Terminal on Galveston Island, where he was responsible for the day-to-day management of the cruise facility, interacting with the cruise lines and the various federal agencies with oversight of the cruise industry. He then became the port’s director of facilities and operations, where he was responsible for cruise operations, including cruise-terminal development.

The self-supporting Port of Galveston—with operating revenues of approximately \$21 million—is Texas’ gateway for cruise sailings and international trade. The port serves as the primary point of embarkation for cruises to the western Caribbean and handles more than 860,000 cruise passengers annually. Carnival Cruise Lines, Disney Cruise Line, Princess Cruises and Royal Caribbean, sail from Texas’ only cruise port.

**C**ITY OF EL PASO Museums and Cultural Affairs Department Director **Sean McGlynn** is now serving as the **United States Urban Arts Federation Executive Committee president**. The committee is

#### NOW ON DISPLAY

**S**EVERAL tourism organizations have been awarded free exhibit space in the Texas Department of Transportation’s Travel Information Centers.

From March through August, these areas promote their attractions with special displays, including colorful photographs and other promotional materials, in the centers’ lobbies.

Every six months, use of the display cases rotates to another set of tourism organizations.

Here are the newly selected exhibit space pairings:

**Anthony:** I-10 Corridor Association

**Denison:** Texas Brazos Trail Region

**Gainesville:** Frisco, Plano, McKinney

**Langtry:** Round Rock, Georgetown, Elgin, Taylor

**Laredo:** West Texas Co-op

**Orange:** Brazoria County Tourism Council

**Texarkana:** Texas Tropical Trail Region

**Valley:** Texas Pecos Trail Region

**Waskom:** Arlington, Mansfield, Grand Prairie

TxDOT will accept applications June 1–10 for the next display period: September through February 2013. For more information, call the Travel Services Section at (512) 486-5800 or visit [www.txdot.gov/travel/tourism\\_industry/display\\_cases.htm](http://www.txdot.gov/travel/tourism_industry/display_cases.htm).

part of Americans for the Arts, the nation’s nonprofit organization for advancing the arts and arts education.

The USUAF—an alliance of the chief executives of local arts agencies in the nation’s 60 largest cities—meets, advocates and networks to discuss the social, educational and economic impact of the arts in their regions, and forecasts national trends.

McGlynn says serving as president of the Urban Arts Federation’s Executive Committee “is a huge honor and a way to continue to share the importance of the cultural work being done in El Paso.”

The other elected members of the USUAF Executive Committee include Felix Padron, director of the City of San Antonio Office of Cultural Affairs, as well as representatives from San Jose, Calif.; Tucson, Ariz.; Seattle, Wash.; Philadelphia, Pa.; and Pittsburgh, Pa.

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Dial toll-free (800) 452-9292 for travel assistance from  
 TxDOT's Texas Travel Information Centers  
 (8 a.m.–6 p.m. daily, Central Time)

\*Compared to last year

TRAVEL CENTER	Month Visitors	Percent Variation*	Year-to-Date Visitors	Percent Variation*
AMARILLO	4,630	-4.46	4,630	-4.46
ANTHONY	3,816	-18.13	3,816	-18.13
CAPTOL	4,857	-10.90	4,857	-10.90
DENISON	20,087	-9.99	20,087	-9.99
GAINESVILLE	17,280	+15.01	17,280	+15.01
LANGTRY	2,768	-5.14	2,768	-5.14
LAREDO	7,301	+17.00	7,301	+17.00
ORANGE	27,120	-15.38	27,120	-15.38
TEXARKANA	19,066	+250.35	19,066	+250.35
VALLEY	28,134	-15.87	28,134	-15.87
WASKOM	16,808	-7.21	16,808	-7.21
WICHITA FALLS	10,471	+11.76	10,471	+11.76
<b>CENTER TOTALS</b>	<b>162,338</b>	<b>+1.54</b>	<b>162,338</b>	<b>+1.54</b>

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**TEXAS TRIVIA**

Buffalo Gap Historic Village, a collection of buildings that helps interpret life on the Texas Frontier (1875–1925), features exhibits, living history demonstrations and interpretive programs like the ongoing Chautauqua Learning Series.

Today, there's the Internet, but in 1875, a movement began in Chautauqua, N.Y., to take educational lectures and entertainment opportunities on the road to reach average Americans who might otherwise miss out on the dose of culture. Buffalo Gap Historic Village's monthly lectures are based on that movement.

Lectures are free, and the series is funded by a grant from the Abilene Cultural Affairs Council, the City of Abilene and the Texas Commission on the Arts.

For more information and a schedule, visit [www.tficc.com/chautauqua](http://www.tficc.com/chautauqua).

What Texas town features an educational series based on the Chautauqua movement that traveled through rural America beginning in the 1800s?

**TEXAS TRIVIA**